



Memorandum

To: Planning Commissioners

From: Adrienne Graham, Consulting Planner

Date: March 26, 2010

RE: Access Considerations for the Baltimore Ravine Specific Plan

At the December 15, 2009, Planning Commission hearing that provided an overview of the proposed Baltimore Ravine Specific Plan, questions were raised by Commissioners and the public regarding the access routes proposed for the plan. This memo identifies the various access options that have been considered and discusses their relative merits.

Overview

Development of the BRSP requires at least two 24-hour, unrestricted access points. The project applicant proposes to provide the required accesses by connecting Herdal Drive to Werner Road, which will require two (2) new bridges over the UPRR tracks and construction of a new road through the BRSP. As noted above, concerns have been raised about the southern access, which would extend Herdal Drive and construct a bridge over the UPRR rail line at Bloomer Cut, a railroad-related historical feature.

Prior projects proposed for the Urban Reserve, which includes the BRSP area, have also had to grapple with the issue of access and a number of different options have been considered. As discussed below, the circulation plans for the Urban Reserve area have, for the most part, assumed that both tracks would need to be crossed, and that the crossings would be placed at locations similar to those proposed in the BRSP. A crossing at Bloomer Cut has been assumed as a primary crossing or an option in all of the plans that were reviewed. Both Maidu Drive and Herdal Drive have been considered as routes to connect the Bloomer Cut crossing to Auburn-Folsom Road. Other access points have been proposed, including connections to Pacific Street and High Street, particularly in the 1993 Southwest Auburn Specific Plan, which provided for connection to these streets in addition to (not instead of) the primary routes via Indian Hill Road and Werner Road.

Staff concurs that the Herdal Drive extension with the bridge over Bloomer Cut is the most appropriate means of providing access to the southern portion of the BRSP. As discussed in more detail below, the extension of Herdal Drive has been part of plans for providing access to the Baltimore Ravine area for more than 30 years, as evidenced by prior plans and the existing right-of-way on the extension. It is the most direct route, involving the least amount of roadway construction, and the shortest bridge span. The amount of cut and fill necessary for this route, and the impacts on natural resources, would be less severe than under other options. The primary disadvantages are that the roadway would be located adjacent to existing backyards and that the

bridge would be constructed over a significant historic resource, Bloomer Cut. However, the extension was anticipated in approvals for the existing residences, and the bridge would be designed so that Bloomer Cut itself would not be altered. The impacts associated with the extension and the bridge over Bloomer Cut will be addressed in detail in the Draft EIR being prepared for the BRSP.

The applicant has provided information regarding the rationale for the alignment of Main Street, with connections to Herdal Drive and Werner Road (see memo dated January 18, 2010).

Historic Access and Circulation Proposals

In the late 1970s, the City applied to the Public Utilities Commission for permission to construct three crossings over the UPRR tracks:

- Separated grade crossing over Bloomer Cut
- At-grade crossing just south of Auburn Recreation District
- At-grade crossing north of Vista Del Valle

The PUC authorized only the grade-separated crossing over Bloomer Cut. The authorization was valid for only 3 years and ultimately expired.

In 1985, the City prepared the Southwest Area Road Access Study, which evaluated two alternative approaches to circulation for the Urban Reserve. In 1986, the City Council adopted a modified version of Alternative 2, which provided for the connection of Herdal Drive to Werner Road. Under this alternative, a new road with two UPRR track crossings would be constructed to connect Herdal Drive to Werner Road, providing access from Auburn Folsom Road to Ophir Road. The track crossings would be located in about the same position as proposed by the BRSP.

In 1987, the City approved the Vista del Valle #4 subdivision, which included the dedication of right-of-way for the Herdal Drive extension as well as the homes on the south side of Herdal Drive that line the extension. The right-of-way was dedicated to take into account the future development of the southwest area and the SW Area Road Study noted above.

An Administrative Draft of the Southwest Auburn Specific Plan (SWASP) was submitted to the City in February 1990 for a 270-acre portion of the Urban Reserve. The Specific Plan provided for 1,056 residential units on 122.6 acres, 103.8 acres of open space, 8.4 acres of retail and business park uses, an elementary school and a 12.7 acre of park. The SWASP circulation plan proposed three (3) primary access points that would connect to Werner Road in the north, Indian Hill Road to the south, and Auburn-Folsom Road to the east (near ARD). The SWASP stated that the bridge locations for the road alignment adopted in 1986 be moved. The crossing of the northern tracks was proposed to move west due to slope conditions at the 1986 location. A crossing north of the Grand Oaks subdivision (not then in existence) was recommended in lieu of the Bloomer Cut bridge, because the PUC authorization for a crossing at Bloomer Cut had expired. The SWASP also stated that a Bloomer Cut bridge may need to accommodate track widening, and that there could be additional approvals required due to its status as a national landmark. The SWASP suggested that a third bridge could be constructed at Bloomer Cut if it turned out to be feasible. Note that Bloomer Cut is not on the National Historic Landmarks List, and the proposed BRSP bridge span is designed to accommodate two tracks.

The SWASP was revised and resubmitted in December 1993. The revised SWASP included the original plan area, plus land adjacent to the Auburn Rancheria (for a total of 321 acres). The land use plan was similar to the 1990 SWASP, providing for 1,232 residential units, 10 acres of commercial space, 30 acres of park and 63 acres of open space. The circulation plan showed potential access at Rogers Lane, Perry Ranch Road, Racetrack Street, High Street, Pacific Street, and Herdal Drive. Specific roadway improvements included:

- Upgrade and extend Werner from Ophir into plan area
- New intersection and road connecting to Indian Hill Road
- New road from Auburn-Folsom near Pacific Street
- Extension of High Street to northeast corner of plan area
- Two rail line crossings with roads connecting to Werner Road and Indian Hill Road
- Potential access shown at Herdal Drive with a crossing of Bloomer Cut
- Optional connection to Maidu Drive instead of Herdal Drive

The 1993 SWASP was evaluated in an Initial Study in March 1994, but the Draft EIR was not completed, and no further action was taken by the City.

Options Considered for the Current Baltimore Ravine Specific Plan

The BRSP proposes two primary access points that would be joined by Main Street, which would traverse the BRSP. Plan Area 1 would be accessed by the extension of Herdal Drive with a bridge crossing the southern rail line at Bloomer Cut. Plan Area 2 would be accessed by a connection to Werner Road, with a bridge over the northern rail line to the east of the existing at-grade crossing. This discussion focuses on the crossing of the southern rail line, because it has been the subject of most concern. The following access options are shown in the attached figure, and addressed in more detail below.

1. Herdal Drive extension
2. Maidu Drive extension
3. May Perry Drive
4. Pacific Street extension
5. Rail line crossing south of Pacific Street
6. High Street extension

A number of factors were included in the consideration of access points, including topography, cost, bridge construction, required easements, natural and historic resources that would be affected, relationship to existing development, ease of extending utilities, and whether additional rights-of-way would need to be obtained.

Proposed Herdal Drive Extension (Site #1)

The proposed access would extend the existing Herdal Drive to the west, across the 60-foot wide City-owned right-of-way, and construct a bridge over the rail line at Bloomer Cut (see Site #1). As with prior plans, Bloomer Cut was considered an optimal point at which to cross the rail line because it would require minimal grade changes in order to span the tracks. A relatively short-span (approximately 70-feet) bridge is proposed, which would clear the existing Bloomer Cut and would provide enough clearance to accommodate the addition of a second track, if UPRR

should decide to construct one. In addition, the City already owns the right-of-way for the roadway, so no additional acquisition would be required. The right-of-way was reserved as part of the Vista del Val Subdivision #4 project in consideration of future development in the Urban Reserve area. For these reasons, this option would be among the least costly. The bridge would span an important historic resource, Bloomer Cut, but the cut itself would not be altered. This route would add traffic through an existing neighborhood, but this was anticipated when the residential development was approved. Impacts on natural resources would be minimized, because the new road would be relatively short (less than 1,000 feet) and would travel through an area that is already disturbed (the City right-of-way) and/or composed primarily of grasslands.

Options Considered but Not Selected

Maidu Drive Extension

The extension of Maidu Drive (Site #2) would entail modifying the existing three-leg intersection of Maidu Drive/Auburn-Folsom Road to a four-leg intersection and extending Maidu Drive westerly through Dutch Ravine to a crossing of the rail line near the westerly terminus of Bloomer Cut. This was one of the options considered in prior plans, including the SWASP. This option would require a longer road extension (approximately 1,300 feet) and right-of-way acquisition for the entire length. Because of the topography, portions of the area would need to be filled and the bridge would need a longer span (approximately 400 feet). Right-of-way acquisition, the longer road and larger bridge, and the more complicated construction would increase costs relative to the Herdal Drive extension. Like the Herdal Drive extension, this option would place the roadway adjacent to existing backyards of residences. In addition, the Maidu Drive extension would require fill of a wetland area, necessitating approval from the US Army Corps of Engineers through the Section 404 permit process. The road would also be constructed through a designated Open Space area under separate ownership. Consequently, the impact on natural resources would be greater under the Maidu Drive option. Like the Herdal Drive extension, this option would construct a bridge over Bloomer Cut.

May Perry Drive

This stub street off of Auburn-Folsom Road at Recreation Park (see Site #3) was built when the current Auburn-Folsom Road was constructed, with the intention of a future extension. It is shown as an additional access in the SWASP, as discussed above. Under this option, a new road would connect to Auburn-Folsom Road north of the rail line, and extend southward, through the ARD recreation area, more or less parallel to the rail line. The road would enter the BRSP area at the northeast corner and travel south through the BRSP until it connected with Main Street. The area that would be traversed by this option includes two ravines that would require bridge crossings.

It is not an option to construct this road in the relatively flat UPRR right-of-way, because UPRR has stated that it would not allow roads to be constructed within its right-of-way (as opposed to bridges across the rail line, which are allowed if UPRR requirements are met). The UPRR right-of-way extends 200 feet on either side of the tracks. Therefore, this option and the following options would need to traverse the varying topography to the west of the UPRR right-of-way.

No crossing of the rail line would be required under this option, so Bloomer Cut would be unaffected. However, it would require right-of-way acquisition for the approximately 2,000 feet

that lie outside of the BRSP area. The roadway would be approximately 4,500 feet long, much of which would travel through woodlands, so it would require more tree removal than the Herdal Drive extension. ARD facilities would also be affected by this alignment, which would bisect Recreation Park. The costs of this option could be relatively high due to the length of the road (which would include utilities), mitigation for loss of trees and impacts on Recreation Park, acquisition of right-of-way and construction of two bridges to cross two ravines.

Pacific Street Extension

Pacific Street ends at Auburn-Folsom Road just southeast of the ARD property. Under this option, Pacific Street would be extended from Auburn-Folsom Road west over the rail line and then turn south to the northeast corner of the BRSP area (see Site #4). In order to bridge the tracks, a significant amount of fill (creating a 30-foot high roadway embankment) would be required. The rail line bridge would need to span approximately 150 to 200 feet, which would be longer than the Bloomer Cut bridge (70 feet), but not as long as a bridge from Maidu Drive (400 feet). The roadway embankment fill would need to extend onto the ARD property where it would then ramp down to meet existing ground elevation on the west side of the tracks. Approximately 1,000 feet of right-of-way would need to be acquired. The alignment within the BRSP would be similar to the May Perry Drive alignment described above, and would require fill and two bridges to cross the ravines, in addition to the bridge over the rail line. Impacts on natural resources, such as trees, would also be similar. The roadway would be a total of approximately 3,500 feet long.

Rail line Crossing South of Pacific Street

This option would provide a connection to Auburn-Folsom Road approximately 400 feet south of Pacific Street (Site #5), near the existing Boardman canal. Due to the elevation of the rail line at this location, an elevated bridge crossing would be required to provide adequate clearance, resulting in significant grading for bridge approaches and a longer bridge span (approximately 200 feet) than the Herdal Drive option. Within the BRSP area, the alignment would be similar to the May Perry and Pacific Street options, so there would need to be significant grading and two additional bridge crossings across two ravines. The total roadway length would be approximately 3,000 feet.

High Street

Another option that was raised in public comment was a connection to High Street, which extends west from Auburn-Folsom Road. This option would connect to Plan Area 2, so it would provide only indirect access to Plan Area 1. High Street terminates in the Woodland Estates subdivision, immediately north of Study Area 3 and west of the northern rail line. This area is fairly steep; High Street has a 15% grade at its terminus. A connection between High Street and Plan Area 2 would require multiple switch backs with steep grades and a bridge over the ravine. The ravine is located approximately 130 feet (in elevation) below the terminus of High Street, so the grade would be fairly steep. After the ravine crossing, the road would continue up at a 15% grade to a ridge top near Interstate 80, and through Baltimore Ravine on a 40% cross slope. Extensive cut and fill would be required. The area is heavily wooded, so there would be extensive impacts on trees. This connection would also route BRSP traffic through an older area of the City with relatively narrow residential streets.

JANUARY 18, 2010

Legend:

- #1 RECOMMENDED SITE ACCESS
- #2 - #5 ALTERNATIVE ACCESS LOCATIONS EVALUATED
- POTENTIAL BRIDGE LOCATIONS

